WAR STORIES.

Stray Bits of Confederate History.

(Mr. B. Wells, writer of the following article, was a clerk in the war department in Washington several years during and after the civil war. After the fall of the Confederacy he was placed in charge of the Confederate government papers which had been sent to Washington by General Sherman. In this capacity Mr. Wells was summoned as witness to the trial of Jefferson Davis in Richmond.)

It is the settled policy of the American people that when a matter of national interest has once been fought out to the end, either on the field of battle, or the less dangerous field of public debate, the issues involved thereafter pass from the domain of history, and are discussed by the victorious or defeated party without any heat of passion or rancorous feeling. In this way all parties alike discuss from the standpoint of history the Mexican war, the slavery question, secession and the late civil war. It is wonderful how soon prejudice disappears, and the political atmosphere becomes clear when once the struggle is over. An issue settled once is settled for all time. In the busy rush of American life no section of the country can afford to sulk, or be illnatured over a defeated cause. The commercial ties which bind the nation together will not permit any section either to be revengeful in the hour of victory or prostrated in the hour of defeat. Commerce carries the olive branch and brings about friendly relations. We are all fellow citizens now, loving our common country, using the past in such a manner that we may thereby better serve the present and future.

I have been requested by some friends to write a sketch of what I know of the "Confederate Archives," after a study of them for more than six years immediately after the close of the civil war. What I shall have to say will be from a purely objective standpoint, and with no politics interwoven. I shall, in the language of the unfortunate Othello:

"Nothing extenuate,
Nor set down aught in malice."

The subject naturally divided itself into three heads:

First—How were the archives obtained?

Second—Of what do they consist?

Third—Of what use have they been to the country?

Lee's Warning to Davis.

A statement as to the manner in which the Confederate archives were obtained recalls to our minds the closing scenes of the war. With General Lee in the early part of 1865 the question of the duration of the war was narrowed down to a mere matter of weeks or months, as circumstances might develop. He had kept Jefferson Davis duly advised of the dangerous tendency of passing events in military circles, and of the movements which General Grant was making or likely to make. He saw that the boa constrictor of hostile forces was tightening its hold and stiffening its muscles and drawing its folds slowly and surely toward the center of the circle within which lay the Confederate capital and its defenders. No help could come to the threatened capital from the far South, for General Joseph E. Johnston had more than he could handle in opposing General Sherman. In view of the gathering clouds General Lee had advised the Confederate government to be ready to leave the beleaguered city of Richmond on short notice. To meet such an emergency the Confederate government had strong boxes made of hard pine, suitable for holding valuable papers and books. The records were carefully packed in them, and the boxes were ready to be closed, locked and shipped at the last moment.

Then came that memorable Sunday morning in April, 1865, when Lee's messenger sought Mr. Davis in church, and conveyed to him the news that the Confederate lines were hopelessly broken, and must fall back and uncover Richmond and Petersburg. The Confederate government must leave Richmond. All was hurry. Warehouses containing cotton and military supplies were in flames and dismay was everywhere. The boxes of records, several hundred in number, were placed on the cars and shipped with all speed to Danville, and thence into the lines of Gen. Joe Johnston's army in North Carolina. Possibly some of the records did not get that far but I am speaking of the bulk of the— Mr. Davis, John C. Breckenridge, secretary of war; John H. Reagan, postmaster general, Judah P. Benjamin, secretary of state; General Sam Cooper, adjutant and inspector general, as well as other officials, were soon in the same neighborhood, and in close communication with General Johnston. The last cabinet meeting took place within his military lines. It was finally decided that Johnston could not hold out, and he was left to make his own terms with Sherman.

At that last meeting the question came up, "What shall be done with the records?" One of the parties present advised that they be burned in order to prevent their capture by the Federal troops. But General Johnston was cool-headed, as well as a good fighter. He stated that when the war was over there would come a time when the history of the events would have to be written. The United States would have the reports of battles sent in by the Federal generals on which to draw for historical material as well as the Congressional records. The South might want to write its version of the battles and sieges, the victories and defeats fought out in the Southern cause. The records of the Confederate government would be of priceless value along this line. The South's side of the war could not be written without access to the records written by Confederate officers. To destroy these records might be to cripple the South, and render a Southern history well nigh impossible. He therefore advised that the Confederate archives be turned over to General Sherman, with a request that they be sent to the adjutant general at Washington, and there preserved as a part of the records of the war.

The Davis Beauregard Feud.

The records of the armies under Beauregard, Johnston and Robert E. Lee were found among the archives. These were the records kept at the headquarters of these generals respectively. It is needless to say that these officers, having had a military education, kept their records well and in regulation style. Among the letters captured at Beauregard's headquarters were many letters of a political character, written by Augusta J. Evans, the Southern novelist and authoress of "St. Elmo," "Macarie" and "Beulah," books which had quite a run between 1861 and 1865, but now somewhat out of date, being founded on political conditions which are now settled and referred to only as matters of past history. These letters were on the current political affairs of that date. They were in her usual pleasant style and breathed a lofty sentiment from a Southern standpoint. She was decidedly opposed to the manner in which Jefferson Davis treated both Beauregard and "Joe" Johnston, and denounced the Confederate president for his overbearing methods and despotic will. She disliked Davis almost as much as she did the "Yankees." Beauregard's records showed the answers to these letters. They were strictly dignified responses to her views, dwelling on his personal opinions of the military situation, and the way in which affairs were conducted by the Confederate chief magistrate. His criticisms of him were many and bitter. It was an ill-concealed secret in military circles in the South that Davis and Beauregard wasted no love on each other, but hated with an intensity which nothing except the danger to their common cause kept within bounds. Beauregard claimed that after the battle of Shiloh Mr. Davis, without cause, withdrew him from active service in the field, where he could win distinction, and assigned him to engineering and defensive duty at Charleston and other seacoast towns, where he was practically shelved.

Among other documents captured with Beauregard were several hundred anonymous printed pamphlets severely criticizing Mr. Davis for partiality, obstinacy and imperfect knowledge of the military situation and for abuse of power. Under military law Beauregard would have been courtmartialed if he had publicly expressed sentiments which were thus privately distributed among his trusted friends. The author was discreet enough to have printed across the front page of each pamphlet in conspicuous type the words "Printed but Not Published." It was a fine point in the strategy of libel to sell a thing without saying it. It is not known whether Mr. Davis ever saw any of these documents, as they were only intended for distribution among Davis's personal enemies in the Confederate Congress. In the letters of Beauregard and Miss Evans and in the printed pamphlet it was stated that Mr. Davis had, in the most important crisis of the war in the West, relieved General Johnston of a highly important position in the field in front of Sherman's army, and had assigned him to the command of the defenses of Mobile, thus depriving the South of his valuable services, and had placed General John B. Hood in his place, for which position, they declared, Hood was incompetent, as the battle of Franklin showed. All the disasters of the Confederate army in the West were ascribed to Mr. Davis's obstinacy and partiality. The correspondence disclosed the fact that other officers were chafing under the arbitrary use of power by Mr. Davis. At this same time enemies of the executive were making themselves heard in the Confederate house of representatives, notably Henry S. Foot, of Mississippi. Davis was becoming unpopular every day in the South, as one disaster after another befell the Confederacy and was charged up to him as the cause.

Secrets from the Confederate Congress.

The records of the Confederate Congress came to us almost entire. They covered all the legislation from the beginning to the close of the war. These debates and acts have all been published and need no special mention here. They have passed into history. In the Confederate House were many speeches of criticism of Davis, Mr. Foote being conspicuously a leader of the anti-administration party. Foote finally left Richmond in disgust and endeavored to reach the federal lines and go North. Mr. Davis made the mistake of his life when he sent troops after him and caught him before he reached the federal lines and brought him back to Richmond. Mr. Foote resumed his place in the house and assailed Davis as before.

The records of the executive sessions of the Confederate Senate disclosed a bitter feud between Senator Hill and Senator Yancey. In the heat of debate Hill struck Yancey a hard blow and felled him to the floor. It is said that Yancey never entirely recovered from the effect of it, and that it shortened his life. The Senate passed a resolution that no account of it should be published.

No records of the Confederate State department were found among the surrendered archives. Certainly there must have been such records, but what became of them has never been disclosed. In the records of the Confederate Congress, however, were found many interesting papers sent there by the State department in answer to resolutions of the Senate from time to time. In this way we have copies of many letters written from France and England by Mason and Sidell. Judah P. Benjamin was Secretary of State at Richmond at the time of the downfall of the government. He made his way to Cuba and thence to England, where he ever afterwards resided. Whether he took the records of his department with him, or destroyed them, or hid them, has never been known.

Napoleon III Deceived the South.

Here and there among the records of the Confederate war department and the letters of Mason and Sidell, mentioned as found in congressional proceedings, we find that the Confederate government had secret agents in France, England, Germany and the Netherlands. We ascertained the names of some of these. The letters from these men detail the efforts made in France, England and Holland to obtain recognition abroad. If we can rely on the letters written from Paris, found among the congressional records, the late Louis Napoleon held out hopes of ultimate recognition, and kept the Confederate representative at Paris in a constant state of expectancy. We know now, however, that the wily emperor did not intend to recognize the Confederacy, but kept Confederate envoys dangling at the end of his fishing pole, playing with them for political purposes, in order to keep the United States in sufficient awe to prevent an interference with his plans for the establishment of Maximillian on the throne of Mexico. The Confederacy firmly expected recognition and the letters from Paris held out hopes to the last. The letters from England were not so buoyant. While many of the nobility favored the South, the middle classes, on account of slavery, were not so favorable.

There were also among the archives incomplete records of the Confederate treasury department, showing the routine business, issues of treasury notes and bonds of various denominations. Everyone has seen specimens of these and a description of them is not necessary. The heads represented on them were those of Jefferson Davis, Alexander H. Stephens, "Stonewall" Jackson, Mr. Trenholm and Mr. Memminger. The South had few facilities for the manufacture of suitable paper for such purposes or for engraving. The bonds and notes presented rather a shabby appearance, when compared with those of the United States. Several large dry goods boxes, containing Confederate money and bonds, were found among the records. The face value of them amounted to many millions of dollars, but the market value was quite another thing. Our offer to turn the boxes of money over to the United States treasury, to be held by the treasurer, was regarded as the standing joke of the season. F. E. Spinner, the treasurer, declared that the war department must not make his office a dumping ground nor an "Old Curiosity Shop." Besides that, he insisted no one was so well qualified to hold the money of the deceased as the "administrator of the late lamented." So we had to hold the money, but we were not required to give any bond on that account, and the auditor of the treasury never asked anyone for an accounting along that line. General T. T. Eckert, assistant secretary of war, jocosely remarked that the more a man had of that kind of money the poorer he was. So great had the value of the money depreciated in the latter days of the war that a pair of boots cost $100, and it required more than that to pay a week's board. It was jokingly remarked that a head of a family needed a market basket full of money to buy a basket full of provisions. This rise in the price of the necessities of life caused the authorities at Richmond to appoint commissioners to regulate the price of the commodities used in daily life. In the archives we often ran across lists of prices established by these commissioners. Paper for writing or printing was very scarce in many parts of the South. Some of the official returns made by officers to the government were written on wall paper, and envelopes were often made of the same material. Paper for printing bank notes was so scarce that they used some times old paper of broken or suspended banks and printed new bills of current banks on the reverse side of the suspended bank and cancelled the old bills with a stamp.

Very few of the records of the Confederate navy were captured. Perhaps some of the missing papers of the navy and State departments were accidentally burned at Richmond at the time of the exacuation. There fell into our hands much that related to blockade running and correspondence with agents in Europe. This correspondence was preserved on account of having been sent to Mr. Seddon, secretary of war, and these letters were kept at the Confederate war office.

When the Confederate forces were driven out of New Orleans, and afterwards from Baton Rouge they carried away with them old records relating to the time when Louisiana was a Spanish, and afterwards French province. They also took with them the records of the Supreme Court of the State. These records drifted about from pillar to post in Louisiana and Texas within the lines of General E. K. Smith, and when he surrendered to General Frank B. Heron of the United States volunteer forces, these records of the State of Louisiana went with the other property and found their way to Washington. Old, dusty and crumbling with age, the records, written in Spanish and French over a hundred years ago, were quaint and interesting as a study of a bygone age. They were in strange contrast with the records which were the product of the war. Old fashioned paper manufactured before any of the actors in the civil war were born, tied together with ribbons, which was the style in the days of Spanish and French rule when high officials of noble blood represented their sovereigns beyond the sea, an air of departed aristocracy hovered over the papers. Stately and dignified to the last degree were the documents they handled and carefully filed away for our respectful investigation. We could almost imagine we saw the knightly royal officers who had written and signed them in their royal master's name. The documents survived to tell their story of the kingly days on American soil long after the hands which had written them had crumbled to dust. The documents were cared for and at a later day when peace had fully come they were restored to the State of Louisiana.

One Man's Double Dealing.

For obvious reasons I withhold the name, but for the sake of convenience I will call him Colonel T. He was of Southern birth and education, but lived in a Northern State before the war and when it began. He took a prominent part in politics, and openly and boldly proclaimed his sentiments in favor of the Southern cause. Then came the firing on Sumter and the President's call for troops to put down the secession movement. To the surprise of everyone, among the first to enlist in the State where he was living was Colonel T. He obtained a commission as major in the volunteer service. From that moment he seemed like a changed man. He expressed no more sympathy for the Southern cause, but entered heartily into the Union service. His regiment was ordered to the front and participated in many battles. He was not deficient in personal courage, and was promoted for bravery on the field of battle. At the close of the war his regiment came to Washington with Sherman's army. He rode at the grand review in May, 1865, wearing the star of a brigadier general.

After the disbanding of the volunteers forces he sought a position in the regular army. Friends in high official circles testified to his gallantry and to wounds received in the service. But his was the fate of Tantalus. The coveted prize of a commission was snatched from his outstretched hands by a circumstance as unforeseen as it was dramatic. Just at that time the Confederate archives arrived in Washington and were being inspected. Among the papers and letters captured from Jefferson Davis was one from Colonel T. It was written to Mr. Davis one or two months before the firing on Sumter. It addressed him as an old friend and acquaintance of years gone by, approved of his course and expressed a wish for the success of the Confederate cause, and closed with a request for a commission in the Southern army. There was no evidence that Davis had ever answered the letter, no indorsement by him beyond the date of receipt. By one of those striking coincidences which are sometimes met with in history, and startle us by the exactness with which they match the occasion, this letter to Mr. Davis was resurrected from the official graveyard to which the Confederate chief had consigned it and hundreds of similar letters during the four years of war, and was carried to the Secretary, Mr. Stanton. Thus it came to pass that on a bright summer morning some months after the war there lay on the desk of the Secretary the application of the colonel asking for a commission in the regular service, and by its side this ghastly letter for former years.

Could the letter of 1861 and the application of 1865 have been vitalized and made to assume human shape they would have stood arrayed against each other in armed hostility, so divergent were they in sentiment. The ghost of 1861 murdered the bright and loyal hopes of 1865. The four years of fighting, the scars received in battle, were all outweighed by the words of the ill omened letter, written perhaps in a moment of haste and indiscretion, and before the feelings of the people had crystalized into that all consuming loyalty which swept over the North after the fall of Sumter. He did not get his commission. He sought a civil position in the West at the hands of President Johnson. His name was sent in to the Senate by the Executive, but the Senate and the President were not on speaking terms just at that time, and spent their time principally in making faces at each other from opposite ends of Pennsylvania avenue. The Senators had heard of the letter and sent for a certified copy of it. The reading of the letter caused the Senators to say "no" with emphasis. That letter came up against him every time he applied for a position and defeated him. I am not discussing whether this result was right. I am only stating facts.

Puzzled.

A man had been absent for some time, and during his absence had raised a pretty luxuriant crop of whiskers, mustache, etc. On returning home he visited a relative, whose little girl he was very fond of.

The little girl made no demonstration toward saluting him with a kiss, as was usual.

"Why, child," said the mother, "don't you give Uncle Will a kiss?"

"Why, ma," returned the little girl, with the most perfect simplicity, "I don't see any place!"

— A Germam inventor has produced an instrument to assist people to swallow pills. A small apparatus is placed in the mouth so that the open tube goes close to the throat, the end is pressed and the pill is on its travel before the taker is aware of the fact.

— No wonder Eve didn't care for the Garden of Eden when no furs were worn there.

— The bigger a woman is in some spots the more she wishes she were not so in some other spots.